

In brief

NHS trust's chairwoman dismissed: Mrs Mary Styth, chairwoman of North Lakeland Healthcare NHS Trust, has been dismissed after an internal inquiry into allegations of abuse and mismanagement from 1996 to 1998. The allegations included brusque and uncaring attitudes, and rough handling of patients. An independent external review panel will investigate the issues further.

Chairman of Alder Hey Hospital resigns: Frank Taylor, chairman of the Royal Liverpool Children's Hospital, Alder Hey, has resigned after the hospital confirmed that it was unable to find the organs of a child, Stephen White, who died in 1992. The health minister, Lord Hunt, has called for a report, which will go to the inquiry team looking at the issue of organ retention at Alder Hey.

Male sperm counts remain steady: Today's men produce as many sperms as their grandfathers did, according to a study in this week's *Fertility and Sterility* journal. A team at the University of Southern California collected semen samples from 1385 men in the Los Angeles area between 1994 and 1997. No significant differences were found when these samples were compared with a 1951 study.

Patient with MS acquitted after using cannabis: A man with multiple sclerosis, Thomas Yates, aged 51, has been found not guilty of producing a controlled drug after police found 40 cannabis plants growing at his home. Like other patients with MS, he relied on the defence of necessity, arguing that cannabis was the only drug that eased his pain without side effects.

UK government to recruit extra drugs counsellors: The UK government has launched an advertising campaign to recruit up to 300 extra drugs counsellors to the prison service, probation service, the police, the voluntary sector, and local authorities.

News extra **BMJ**

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Privy Council sets aside GMC ruling

Clare Dyer *legal correspondent, BMJ*

The Privy Council has set aside a General Medical Council ruling striking a GP off the medical register for sexual improprieties after throwing out one of the charges found proved by the GMC.

The three judges dismissed a charge that Emmanuel Nwabueze had had sexual intercourse at his surgery at Prestatyn in Clwyd on 26 December 1995 with a former patient.

The judges—Lord Hope, Sir Patrick Russell, and Sir Andrew Leggatt—ordered that Dr Nwabueze should be re-sentenced on the remaining

charges found proved against him, if those charges are held to amount to serious professional misconduct, at a new hearing. No date has yet been set for the rehearing and sentencing.

The GP has been practising since his name was ordered to be erased from the medical register last April and is continuing to practise pending the new hearing.

In an unprecedented move before the Privy Council hearing, the GMC won an injunction against Richard Colman, one of the five member panel of the professional conduct committee that heard Dr Nwabueze's case, banning him from disclosing details of the panel's confidential deliberations to the GP's solicitor.

Dr Colman, a York GP, wrote to the GMC's president, Sir Donald Irvine, after Dr Nwabueze was struck off, expressing his concern about

the proceedings. He felt the panel's chairman, Jeremy Lee-Potter, had been "too dominating."

He also contacted Dr Nwabueze's solicitor, Ralph Shipway, offering help in preparing an appeal to the Privy Council, but the GMC injunction prevented him from speaking to Mr Shipway about the panel's discussions, which took place in camera.

The Privy Council held, in an appeal brought by John Roylance, former chief executive of United Bristol NHS Healthcare Trust, that the GMC's in camera discussions are protected from disclosure by public interest immunity. Dr Colman, who is no longer a member of the GMC, fears that the system may not offer enough safeguards for doctors at a time of growing pressure to get through an expanding caseload quickly. □

Half of Bangladesh population at risk of arsenic poisoning

Ganapati Mudur *Boston*

Bangladesh may be heading for an epidemic of arsenic poisoning with an estimated 60 million regularly ingesting arsenic through drinking contaminated groundwater, a public health specialist cautioned last week.

More than 7000 people in Bangladesh have already been diagnosed with symptoms of arsenic poisoning but half of the country's population may be at risk, Enamul Karim, vice president of the Bangladesh public

health association, said at a conference on international health, which was sponsored by Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and held at Harvard University.

Surveys of groundwater used for drinking and cooking have identified unacceptably high concentrations of arsenic in several thousand deep tube wells, Dr Karim said. Some wells contain 0.4 mg/l of arsenic, 40 times the acceptable concentration, he added.

The first cases of arsenic poisoning on the Indian subcontinent caused by contaminated groundwater occurred in the neighbouring state of West Bengal in India, which borders Bangladesh. By the mid-1990s, Indian doctors had detected 220 000 cases of chronic arsenic poisoning and had dubbed it the "biggest arsenic calamity in the world" (*BMJ* 1996;313:9).

"Bangladesh faces a dilemma," said Dr Karim. "Do we now ask people to revert to surface water and risk cholera or rotavirus infections or allow them to continue drinking tube well water laced with arsenic?"

The source of the arsenic is geological. The alluvial sediments in the region are rich in iron pyrites, which contain arsenic. □



Bangladesh's contaminated wells: some have 40 times the acceptable concentration of arsenic

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